

December 11, 2002

Program Elimination Commission
Bob Rafferty, Chairperson
4090 Westown Pkwy Ste A-3
West Des Moines, IA 50266

Re: *Des Moines Register* article Panel: Merge Mental Hospitals – Dec. 10, 2002 by Jonathon Roos

Dear Bob Rafferty:

We as community leaders, county supervisors and business leaders appreciate the difficult task you and your group have been assigned. We recognize your recommendation to close two mental health institutes. We firmly believe, as residents of Cherokee County that the Cherokee Human Resource Center should not only maintain the existing programs on the campus, but also utilize the excellent facilities to accommodate other programs.

As taxpayers we empathize with the past budget cuts and recognize that DHS has reduced mental health beds by 40% statewide. There currently is a long waiting list for people who need mental health care. Over the past few years we have initiated invitations to legislative members, DHS and DOC representatives to visit the Cherokee Human Resource Center campus and meet with us to discuss ways to expand programs and fill vacant buildings. We are scheduled to open the CCUSO program in April and are appreciative of this opportunity. All other ideas we proposed have received no consideration from DHS or DOC. Utilizing vacant space poses major economic advantages. Any new program would realize substantial savings by incorporating existing support services available at Cherokee Mental Health Institute, i.e. foodservices, laundry, information technology services and maintenance that could handle the workload without increases in labor costs. Labor costs would be limited to direct care staff. The

Human Resource Center campus has recently received \$5 million in major infrastructure funds for facility improvements to include a new roof, electrical upgrade and the relocation of the CCUSO program to Cherokee. This work has been completed and/or in progress. In our judgment, it simply is not good stewardship of taxpayer's dollars to walk away from the enormous investment and excellent facilities and staff that are already in place.

The management at Cherokee Human Resource Center has been creative and entrepreneurial in its quest to explore alternate uses of the campus. They have been successful in partnering with and providing space for other agencies that serve our community and surrounding counties. These agencies are Youth Emergency Services; a 14-county youth detention center, Cherokee Boys and Girls Home & Family Services, Inc. of Sioux City; a satellite residential treatment center, and the 3rd District Juvenile Court System has an officer on our campus, West Cedar Plymouth Life-a 14-bed residential care facility. Also, CHRC is a provider of psychiatric services should the need arise to these clients. These agencies provide a work base for 80 employees. CHRC has a work agreement with the DOC, North Central Correctional Facility in Rockwell City and utilizes the Offender Employment Program to provide inmates work experiences in the foodservice field, maintenance, remodeling/construction and landscaping. This situation gives the inmates on the job training and provides much-needed man-hours of labor. It is a win-win situation for both the DHS and DOC. The City of Cherokee and Cherokee County have signed agreements and are using inmates, also.

In the recent 2000 census report, Cherokee County ranked 4th among the counties affected by a decline in population from 1990. As we all know, Iowa as a whole has seen a decline in population in the last decade. We must all take to heart this message of decline and take actions to encourage and promote jobs and migration to our state and community. The loss of the Cherokee Human Resource Center would have a devastating impact on an already depressed economic situation in rural Iowa.

On behalf of the citizens of Cherokee County, we would welcome the opportunity to have you personally visit the campus and present you with more specific information and a tour of the facility or we

would be available to visit you at your convenience. We have contacted other area legislators and extended the same invitation.

Your consideration in exploring this opportunity would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Cordially,

Mark Buschkamp, Executive Director-Cherokee Area Economic Development – 712-225-5739

Mike Hunter, President, Cherokee Area Economic Development Corporation

Dennis Hendrich, Mayor of the City of Cherokee

Jeff Simonsen, Cherokee County Board of Supervisors Chairman

Jeff Hayes, Cherokee Industrial Corporation

Marci Brown, Cherokee Chamber of Commerce

CC: Senator Mary Lou Freeman
Representative Dan Huseman
Senator Ken Veenstra
Representative Dave Heaton
Senator Stan Johnson
Representative Dave Heaton